

ASCLEPIUS AND THE LEGACY OF THESSALY

The narrative of Pausanias offers a very unusual insight into the cults which existed at the time of his travels, c. A.D. 150. Nothing is abstract. Every god and every myth is firmly linked to the physical place in which the traveller encountered them; and though comparison is sometimes made by the author, what we are presented with is a series of regional specialities.¹

It is therefore unsurprising that in Book 2, when Pausanias is describing Epidaurus, his attention falls on Asclepius; nor that he describes in great detail the precise nature of the god's connection to that place. However, there are two factors which suggest that this episode should not simply be taken for granted as typical of the travel-narrative. The first is that the treatment which Asclepius receives in the account is quite distinct from the way in which Pausanias describes the other gods whose cult-sites he encounters. The second is that a substantial quantity of evidence suggests that this emphasis on tying Asclepius to a location is not simply a feature of Pausanias' project, but rather that, in this case, the author was reflecting an important characteristic of the god and his cult in antiquity. The exploration of that characteristic, the special relationship between Asclepius and location, is the first purpose of this paper; the second is to suggest that it was an influential legacy of the pre-existing form of the cult in Thessaly.

Ἀσκληπιοῦ δὲ ἱερὰν μάλιστα εἶναι τὴν γῆν ἐπὶ λόγῳ συμβέβηκε τοιῷδε.

With this programmatic opening (2.26.3), Pausanias introduces into his description of Epidaurus a lengthy excursus about that place's claim on the god. The nature of the λόγος in the quotation above soon becomes clear: Epidaurus is 'especially sacred to Asclepius' because, according to a myth which Pausanias relates, he was born there. But Pausanias does not let the matter rest there. He presents, in all, three different stories about the parentage of Asclepius—keeping, of course, the indispensable identity of the father, Apollo—and in the course of the description makes clear his preference for the one which connects Asclepius with Epidaurus. He is especially critical of the story which makes Asclepius the son of Arsinoë, for the obvious reason that if Asclepius was the son of Arsinoë, he would thus have been a Messenian rather than an Epidaurian.

It is clear that the debate which is conducted in his account reflected a debate which existed outside it, in the centres of the Asclepius cult, and most notably in Epidaurus. The sanctuary of Asclepius at Epidaurus seems to have been established no earlier than the sixth century B.C.,² and there is no doubt that the intense debate which Pausanias, centuries later, reflects must have been greatly fuelled—though not

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¹ For the relationship between landscape and cult in Pausanias, see A. Cohen, 'Art, myth and travel in the Hellenistic world', in S. Alcock, J. Cherry, and J. Elsner (edd.), *Pausanias: Travel and Memory in Roman Greece* (Oxford, 2001), 93–126. For interesting ideas concerning Pausanias' preoccupation with the beginnings of cults, see E. L. Bowie, 'Past and present in Pausanias', in *Pausanias Historien*, Fondation Hardt 41 (Geneva, 1994), 207–39.

² See R. A. Tomlinson, *Epidaurus* (Granada, 1983), esp. 21ff.

begun—by the entrance of this new heavyweight participant into the contest. Especially striking is the way in which the myths concerning Epidaurus seem to have ‘recycled’ elements of much earlier traditions concerned with other regions as a way of tying Asclepius to Epidaurus. In order to examine the way in which this process was conducted, it is first necessary to summarize the myths which already existed before the sanctuary at Epidaurus became the most prominent location of the Asclepius-cult.

There are two early traditions concerning the birth of Asclepius. One places the event in Thessaly, the other in Messenia. Both versions seem to be represented in the *Iliad* (2.729–33), and both in fragments of Hesiod’s work. The first extant text which treats the Thessalian version fully is an Ode of Pindar (*Pythian* 3), and it is from this source that the details are known to us.³ It makes Asclepius the son of the Thessalian Coronis, daughter of Phlegyas, and sets the story in Lacerea, near lake Boibeis on the east side of Thessaly. The scholiast on this Ode gives us scraps of the *Catalogue of Women* (Hesiod fr. 50 West) which treat the alternative version, making Arsinoë the Messenian the mother of Asclepius, and this may have been what Pausanias had in mind when he issued the following damning verdict:

... ‘*Ἡσίόδου ἣ τῶν τινα ἐμπεποιηκότων εἰς τὰ ‘Ἡσιόδου τὰ ἔπη συνθέντα ἐς τὴν Μεσσηνίων χάριν.*’ (2.26.8)

Both versions of the birth, which are clearly of great antiquity, provide enough recognizable ‘ingredients’ for us to be able to comment on how those ingredients are used in later myths.

It should first be said, however, that the importance of location as a means of determining the relative status of different sanctuaries is by no means unique to Asclepius; all gods were associated with particular sites of worship, and these associations were expressed and reinforced in myth. What distinguishes the case of Asclepius is the apparent scale of the location debate that we see reflected in Pausanias, and the very particular way in which it was conducted. The pattern of the myths designed to ‘place’ Asclepius revolves, as we have already seen from the summary above, around one feature that marks him out from his divine colleagues: his birth to a mortal woman. This feature of half mortal, half immortal parentage is of course, immediately reminiscent of another important group in Greek religion: heroes.⁴ The connections between Asclepius and certain heroic figures in particular will be treated later in the paper. Now something must be said about the effect of a mortal parent on the ‘placing’ of Asclepius.

Several gods are of course born, though to two divine parents; so we must ask whether the figure of the mortal mother is really of significance. If we look at the myths preserved in Pausanias, it soon becomes clear that the mother has a vital bearing on the issue of location. The existence of a mortal mother introduces an immediate necessity: that of determining who she was, and where she was from. For the homeland

³ Pindar does not seem to have deviated significantly from the story which he inherited; compare with his account, for instance, Hesiod fr. 60 West.

⁴ It is possible to argue against the assertion that half-mortal parentage is a ‘heroic’ feature by citing the example of Dionysus, a god who, at least in the Euripidean version, is the child of the human Semele. But between this case and that of Asclepius lies a vital difference. Dionysus does not actually undergo birth to a mortal. The intervention of Zeus saves him both from the death which overcomes his mother, and from the defining process of emerging from her womb. His transferral to a divine parent—especially one as pan-Hellenic as Zeus—means that his connection with a particular place is weakened, though not broken.

of the god's mother has a particularly strong claim on the god himself. The case of Leto, who gave birth to Apollo on the island of Delos, illustrates very well the different consequences of purely divine parentage. The *Homeric Hymn to Delian Apollo* (lines 45–139) predictably enlarges on the status acquired by the island as a result of its role in the tale. But Delos remains a temporary location, Leto's maternity hospital rather than her native land. By contrast, if it was believed that Asclepius' mother was—for instance—an Epidaurian, it followed that Asclepius was in some ways an Epidaurian as well, and the resulting connection between god and place was a great deal more intimate.

Having established the importance of Asclepius' birth to a mortal woman, we may look more closely at the nature of the various myths of location, and examine how they exploit the possibility for unparalleled connection he thus offered. The myths fall into three types depending on the extent and nature of the claim made on the god. The first type simply exploits the phenomenon described above, by claiming the mother as a native of the land. As we have seen, the debate about whether Thessalian Coronis or Messenian Arsinoë gave birth to Asclepius was being conducted at a very early date; and Epidaurus became an energetic contestant. By the end of the fourth century Isyllus gives Asclepius an Epidaurian mother and calls her Coronis, also mentioning her father Phlegyas, thus performing a direct transposition of names from the Thessalian story.⁵ This avoids the necessity of fabricating a whole new set of characters, while changing the setting completely. It is likely that the story of the Epidaurian Coronis had been long in circulation by the time Isyllus made use of it.

The other types of myth are successive departures from the very direct connection with the god achieved by appropriating the mother. In the second category, a region does not claim the mother as native, but asserts that she gave birth to Asclepius on its soil. Most interesting of these is the story with which Pausanias begins his discussion (2.26.3–5). The Thessalian identity of Phlegyas and his (unnamed) daughter is conceded, but she is in the territory of Epidaurus when labour overtakes her. Moreover, after the birth itself, the land itself takes on the role of foster-mother: Asclepius is exposed on a mountain called Titthion ('breast'), and suckled by a native she-goat. This version overlaps with the first type of myth because it ensures that Asclepius can still be regarded as in some way as the region's 'product'. Slightly less ambitious is the oracle which Pausanias cites (2.26.7), which says simply that Coronis bore Asclepius in the land of Epidaurus.

The third type is a further step along the sequence of 'next best things'; it is also the one most familiar to us from the myths surrounding other deities, and the least particular to Asclepius. It makes no claims upon his unique mortal persona, preferring to establish association with his divine—often serpentine—form, by means of what we might call a 'myth of arrival'. Pausanias tells us of a claim by the Sicyonians that Asclepius turned up in their land in the form of a gigantic snake, borne in a chariot (2.10.3). And not far distant in time from Pausanias' career, Lucian composed his attack on Alexander the prophet of Asclepius, in which another striking example of the arrival-motif is found. In order to establish a new and especially favoured cult-site at Abonouteichus in Paphlagonia on the southern shore of the Black Sea, the charlatan Alexander buries in the foundations of the half-built temple an egg containing—by his contrivance—a baby snake. This creature he hails as the god and takes away to reside with him; in time it miraculously 'grows up' into a full-sized serpent (which he has

⁵ Isyllus, lines 41–45 (*IG* IV² 128).

previously acquired, interestingly, from Pella) and continues to be regarded by the simple folk of Abonouteichus as the god himself.⁶

We might compare this with an Attic inscription, on the so-called Telemachus Monument, which tells of the god's arrival in Athens.⁷ The text is highly uncertain: since the motif of arrival is not the main focus of this paper, I shall not enter into detailed discussion of the various conjectures and their strengths and weaknesses. Suffice it to say that the widely accepted reconstruction of Beschi (*SEG* XXV.226) presents various interesting possibilities. It is fairly certain that lines 8–12 describe the god's arrival in the Eleusinion from Zea.⁸ Lines 12–15 state that someone (probably Telemachus) 'summoning a snake from home, brought it here in a chariot'.⁹ This is immediately reminiscent of Alexander's trick in Abonouteichus and even more strikingly similar to the arrival of Asclepius in Sicyon (Pausanias 2.10.3). But the word for snake is particularly uncertain; it is thought by Beschi and Parker that $\Delta PA[KONTA]$ (lines 13–14) should be substituted for the epigraphically more plausible $\Delta IA[KONON]$ ('attendant'), but this conjecture is not unassailable. The most one can say with any confidence is that the Telemachus monument reinforces the impression that the motif of arrival was extremely important in the dissemination of Asclepius' cult.

As has been said, however, the motif of arrival is by no means peculiar to Asclepius. The *Homeric Hymn to Pythian Apollo* (lines 214–85) similarly describes the travels of

⁶ Lucian, *Alex.* 13. For the Pella connection, see *Alex.* 7. See below for discussion of the connection of the snake with Asclepius. Another good example of the presence of a snake signifying the arrival of the god in a place is to be found in Pausanias 3.23.7, which describes how the Boeatae, coming from Epidaurus to settle in Laconia, bring with them a sacred snake of Asclepius; the snake escapes from their ship and vanishes into the earth near the shore, and the Boeatae settle in that area and erect an altar to Asclepius on the spot where the snake disappeared.

⁷ *IG* II² 4960a.

⁸ It is possible that these lines describe Asclepius 'lodging' in the Eleusinion. The translation of $[\kappa\alpha\tau\eta\gamma\epsilon\tau\omicron]$ (line 11) in this way is favoured by R. Parker (*Athenian Religion: A History* [Oxford, 1996], 175ff) and K. Clinton ('The Epidauria and the arrival of Asklepios in Athens', in R. Hägg (ed.), *Ancient Greek Cult Practice from the Epigraphic Evidence* [Stockholm, 1994], 17–34). But R. Garland (*Introducing New Gods: The Politics of Athenian Religion* [London, 1992], 118) translates line 11 as 'he was conveyed to the El[eusinio]n', and a definitive decision as to which is correct cannot be made. In addition, Parker (178) advances the attractive theory that the subject of $[\kappa\alpha\tau\eta\gamma\epsilon\tau\omicron]$ is not Asclepius but Telemachus, whom he sees as an Epidaurian bringing his native deity to Athens. This general uncertainty is unfortunate because the idea of Asclepius lodging in the Eleusinion would accord well with Lucian's account of the snake Asclepius dwelling with its priest, Alexander. But it is certain that a strong tradition existed in antiquity in which the god, when he had arrived in Athens and was awaiting the completion of his temple, was given hospitality by Sophocles, who received heroic honours as a result (See *TrGF* IV, 57–8, T.67–73). Grave doubts have been raised about whether the heroization of Sophocles for this reason really occurred: see, for example, A. Conolly, 'Was Sophocles heroised as Dexion?', *JHS* 118 (1998), 1–21. This debate, however, does not negate the fact that the idea of a human giving Asclepius hospitality was conceivable, a fact that is interesting in itself. Compare line 76 of Isyllus' poem, which mentions Asclepius being received with $\xi\epsilon\nu\acute{\iota}\alpha\iota$, the treatment reserved for a guest. The impression is that of a god who, after his arrival, can dwell in mortal lodgings. Theocritus (*Epigr.* 7), says that he 'went to Miletus' to dwell with Nicias. Isyllus on the motif of arrival: $\epsilon\lambda\theta\acute{o}\nu\tau\alpha$, line 73. In this case Asclepius is specifically coming to the rescue.

⁹ Lines 12–15:

... καὶ οἴκοθε[ν]
 $[\mu\epsilon\tau\alpha\pi\epsilon\mu\psi\acute{\alpha}\mu\epsilon\nu\omicron\varsigma\ \delta<\rho>\acute{\alpha}[\kappa]-$
 $[\omicron\upsilon\tau\alpha\ \eta\gamma] \alpha\gamma\epsilon\nu\ \delta\epsilon\upsilon\acute{\rho}\omicron\ \acute{\epsilon}\phi' [\acute{\alpha}]-$
 $[\rho\mu\alpha\tau\omicron\varsigma]\ \tau\eta\lambda\acute{\epsilon}\mu\alpha\chi\omicron[s] \dots$

Apollo from place to place; at each stage of his journey, his presence ratifies the place's claim to a special relationship with the god, and forms the basis of their foundation-myths. But I would argue that what distinguishes, crucially, the case of Asclepius is an unusual degree of emphasis placed on the idea of Asclepius taking up residence in person—not merely founding a sanctuary and then moving on, but conferring his actual and lasting presence on a place. The snake form is often instrumental in this, lending extra tangibility to his presence.

In summary, the evidence suggests that it was very important in the cult of Asclepius that the god should be firmly connected to a certain place and that he should be thought to reside there in person. Pausanias' account provides a window onto an important feature of the cult throughout Greece: the preoccupation with placing Asclepius himself in exact geographical terms, and with establishing his actual location.¹⁰ To a large extent, this may be seen as the legacy of the extreme 'placeability' which was the result of mortal birth, and it was certainly this mortal birth which gave the location-myths of Asclepius their distinctive pattern. The myths of arrival were a means of dealing with Asclepius' unusually 'place specific' quality: in the context of a very rapid growth in the range and popularity of his cult, they allowed more sites to have a share of his (originally highly exclusive) presence, after that presence had been claimed with some finality, it seems, by Epidaurus. But this does not fully explain why his actual presence should have been of such enduring importance. The next stage of this paper argues that it is valuable to regard this feature of the god as a legacy of his early cult in Thessaly.

Now Thessaly features not at all in Pausanias' discussion of Asclepius; indeed, the region seems hardly to have impinged on his tourist's consciousness, being denied a place in the 'Greece' through which he toured. This fact by itself should incline us to treat his neglect of the Thessalian cult with some caution, as likely to reflect his own preoccupations rather more than the reality of the cult. Moreover, this neglect is not shared by Strabo, writing more than a century earlier than Pausanias in the Augustan age. Whereas Pausanias says τὰ γὰρ Ἀσκληπιεία εὕρισκω τὰ ἐπιφανέστατα γεγονότα ἐξ Ἐπιδαύρου (2.26.8), regarding Epidaurus as the essential origin of the cult with which he was familiar, Strabo refers to the temple of the god at Triikka, in Thessaly, as τὸ ἀρχαιότατον καὶ ἐπιφανέστατον (9.5.17). On another occasion, he refers to a 'temple of Triikkaian Asklepios' in Gerenia as being ἀφίδρυμα τοῦ ἐν τῇ Θετταλικῇ Τρίκκῃ (8.4.4). For Strabo, Triikkaian Asclepius was a recognizable form of the god, and Thessalian Triikka the ultimate origin of the cult.¹¹

Unfortunately—but not unexpectedly—Strabo's is a lone voice on the matter; and we cannot accept his assertions without seeking external corroboration. The most

¹⁰ A striking echo of the theme of the progress through Greece of Asclepius and his cult occurs in Julian, *Contra Galilaeos*, 200 A–B: he says that, having first appeared at Epidaurus as an individual man, Asclepius both travelled and replicated himself, sending versions to various destinations.

¹¹ For a further instance of Strabo's attitude to Triikka, see 8.6.15. Here he places it alongside Cos and Epidaurus, two major sanctuaries, in a list of the sites which contained votive tablets detailing the *θεραπείαι* performed. Whereas Pausanias' obvious interest in Epidaurus suggests a motive for pressing its cultic claims to the exclusion of Triikka, an equivalent bias towards the Thessalian site is not discernible in Strabo, and it is thus comparatively unlikely that he exaggerated its importance. E. and L. Edelstein (*Asclepius: A Collection and Interpretation of the Testimonies* [Baltimore, 1945], 2.97–8) are firm in their belief that the Epidaurian cult of Asclepius pre-dated that at Triikka. They advance some points to support their view, such as the fact that the authority of Delphi endorsed the Epidaurian cult and is not recorded as having paid any heed to the one at Triikka, but the result is not convincing.

obvious method would of course be through analysis and exact dating of the archaeological remains at Trikka, but this is made impossible by the fact that the sanctuary of Asclepius at Trikka is as yet undiscovered.¹² This leaves only one thing: the mythic accounts of great antiquity which make Asclepius in his mortal form a Thessalian. The mortal birth which we have already remarked on is followed, in the myths, by a career as a healer which ends with death. But these myths in their turn present us with two further problems. The first is that of determining the relationship between Asclepius the mortal hero and Asclepius the recipient of cult. Can we assume that the antiquity of Asclepius the mortal Thessalian is matched by the antiquity of his cult in that region? The second problem is that although in the *Iliad* (2.729–33) Trikka is named as the home of Asclepius and his sons, in other myths we are told only the place of his birth, and that is in another part of Thessaly (see above for the story of Coronis). Trikka is in the region of Thessaly called Hestiaiotis, in the west; Lacereaia, where Coronis lives in Pindar's account and in a fragment of Hesiod (fr. 59 West), is on the east side, south of Magnesia.

Dealing with the question of how Asclepius the mythic hero related to the Asclepius of cult, it is necessary to give some attention to what we mean by 'hero'. In antiquity, the word denoted a figure who lived in the mythic past and whose deeds were beyond the scope of normal men. In Homer, this acquires a specific martial context to accord with the themes of epic: heroes were outstanding warriors. Outside Homer, there is added a further element: heroes are great men of the past who now receive cult honours to an extent that exceeds the usual offerings at the graves of the dead.¹³ Now Edelstein and Edelstein¹⁴ are hampered in their treatment of Asclepius by their seeming failure to conceive of this latter entity, the hero of cult.¹⁵ Thus they strive to reconcile a mortal with a god, and do not conceive of a state incorporating key aspects of both, a state that Asclepius undoubtedly embodied. This results in the formulation of a simple and pseudo-historical linear progression by which Asclepius began as a mortal hero and then, at some fixed time, became a god.¹⁶ In this picture, the figure of the Thessalian healer is fairly insignificant: it was in Epidaurus, they claim, that he became a god, whatever his mythic persona. Thus a dual schism is formed between, first, hero and god, and, second, epic and cult practice. Asclepius the hero is simply a figure in fictional narrative, entirely separate from the god of Epidaurus. This is clearly unsatisfactory, but by admitting this we face the necessity of trying to do better in the fraught matter of resolving the hiatus between the apparently divergent role of Asclepius in myth and his role in cult. Only by creating a picture of the relationship between the two figures can we determine the significance of Thessaly to his cult.

The two most pointed contradictory theories on this matter with regard to

¹² It is possible that the building at Trikka uncovered by Theocharis in 1958 is the temple in question, but this is unverifiable. See J. Ziehen, 'Über die Lage des Asklepios-Heiligtums von Trikka', *AM* 17 (1892), 195–7.

¹³ A. Snodgrass ('Les Origines du Culte des Héros dans la Grèce Antique', in G. Gnoli and J.-P. Vernant [edd.], *La Mort, les Morts dans les Sociétés Anciennes* [Cambridge, 1982], 107–19) notes about the hero of cult that 'il n'était pas nécessaire qu'on lui attribue des grands exploits personnels' (107); it was enough for him to be associated in myth with the *âge héroïque*.

¹⁴ Edelstein and Edelstein (n. 11).

¹⁵ The Edelsteins' work on Asclepius was completed more than a decade too early to be influenced by A. Brelich's *Gli eroi greci: un problema storico-religioso* (Rome, 1958), important for the way in which it plotted the defining characteristics of a hero as a cultic entity. It is, however, remarkable how little impact L. R. Farnell (*Greek Hero Cults and Ideas of Immortality* [Oxford, 1921]) seems to have had on their approach.

¹⁶ Edelstein and Edelstein (n. 11), 2.98.

Asclepius himself are those of Hausmann and Kerényi.¹⁷ Both try to solve the question of the mortal/god, myth/cult relationship by positing a hypothetical chronological order. For Hausmann, Trikka is all-important as the birthplace of a living man, a real healer who was exalted to more-than-mortal status after his death. In other words, for him the myths preserve the realities of the cult's origin, and the importance of Thessaly, and Trikka in particular, is simple and factual. Kerényi also upholds the crucial role of Thessaly, but disputes both the importance of Trikka (upon which Hausmann did indeed put more stress than the limited evidence could plausibly sustain) and the idea of a real person as the starting-point of the cult. For him, Thessaly was the first home of the god.

So Hausmann effectively endorsed the instinctive ancient approach to Asclepius, and indeed to all heroes, which is summarized by Foucart: 'Les Grecs n'ont jamais douté que leurs Héros avaient été des hommes.'¹⁸ There is no way of actually disproving the possibility that a living person in Thessaly was somehow involved in the genesis of Asclepius; the problem is that that person could never be found in the myths. As will become apparent in the discussion of the mortal Asclepius below, his mortal mythic persona is built around a series of motifs shared with heroic personalities in other parts of Greece; one could say that it uses a set of building blocks which were available for the formation of a type. The myths certainly cannot be regarded as the chronicle of a real person. This realization does great damage to Hausmann's conception of the role of Thessaly, for if the myths do not lead us to a real person, how can they lead us to a real location?

A valuable approach is to recall the injunction of Schachter, that a distinction be drawn between cult and cult *αἰτία*; that is, between the cult practices which surrounded a hero and the stories which explained those practices and gave them a history.¹⁹ Following this distinction, which he applies to Boeotian cults, one might see the stories of Asclepius' mortal life as having originated in response to his cult. If this is so, and the cult itself is the starting point in the equation, then it is impossible *not* to see the stories of the Thessalian Asclepius as having derived from some actual cult practice in the area. Just as Boeotian *αἰτίαι* came about in order to explain the origin of the oracle of Trophonios at Lebadeia, so one can easily envisage a local healing-cult in Thessaly gradually accumulating a background of myth about a miraculous healer begotten by Apollo and instructed by Chiron.²⁰

¹⁷ U. Hausmann, *Kunst und Heilum: Untersuchungen zu den griechischen Asklepiosreliefs* (Potsdam, 1948), esp. 18; C. Kerényi, *Asklepios: Archetypal Image of the Physician's Existence* (London, 1959), xiii–xv.

¹⁸ P. Foucart, *Le Culte des Héros chez les Grecs* (Paris, 1918), 67.

¹⁹ A. Schachter, *Cults of Boiotia* (London, 1981), 3.69–71. In this way, in the Boeotian cases he discusses, he effectively reverses the approach which sees the dissemination of epic as the catalyst which fuelled the development of hero-cult. See C. Antonaccio, 'Contesting the past: tomb cult, hero cult and epic in early Greece', *AJA* 98 (1994), 389–410, for an evaluation of this approach and its adherents, the most effective of whom remains N. Coldstream ('Hero-cults in the age of Homer', *JHS* 96 [1976], 8–17), though on the whole it is hard not to agree with Antonaccio (400) when she concludes, 'The small number of early hero-cults, and their location and distribution, do not lend support to the theory of Homeric influence.' There do seem to be one or two cases of figures from epic taking on a cultic aspect—Menelaus at Sparta, for instance, and Agamemnon at Mycenae; such figures, however, form a type quite distinct from that of Asclepius, whose role in Homeric epic is negligible, and certainly not sufficient to have inspired single-handed the creation of a cult. For an attempt to reconcile the Homeric concept of the hero with hero-cult, see G. Nagy, *The Best of the Achaeans* (Baltimore, 1979), 114–17 and 159–61.

²⁰ One question worth posing, though it will probably never be answered with certainty, is

Something should be said at this point about how the testimony of the *Iliad* fits into this picture. It has been noted that Homer shows absolutely no awareness of the cult aspect of heroes: to him, they are just superlative mortal fighters. One way of explaining this has been to point to the lack of hero-cult in Ionia. But I wonder whether such an explanation is even necessary; really, one need look no further than Homer's standpoint as storyteller. His narrative is not set in his own time. Whatever cultic status some of his characters may have been accorded when the *Iliad* was composed, such things would have been an anachronism in his narrative. In other words, Homer should be seen as a part of the aetiological tradition discussed above, telling the stories of the heroes who were regarded as so vastly superior to the men of his own time, explaining how they came by their greatness, if not by their cult. And if Triikka in his day was an important centre of the cult of Asclepius, it would be an understandable action on his part to insert it into his narrative as the homeland of the mortal Asclepius and his sons. Once again, the connection between myth and cult is a strong one.

Although it will never be possible to determine the exact location in which Asclepius was *first* the recipient of cult, it seems perverse to argue against the very great age of the Triikkaian cult; therefore it is in this case preferable to refer to the Triikka site as a precursor to the later centres rather than employing the tendentious term 'origin'. A lack of references to Triikka earlier than the passage of Isyllus quoted below is hardly surprising, given the extent to which Thessaly tended to be ignored by the rest of Greece, and the way in which later centres of the cult such as Epidauros came to eclipse the Triikkaian one. Given this, it would be much more reasonable to expect that traces of an earlier cult would be discernible at Epidauros than in Thessaly. Thus the importance of Thessaly in the early stages of the cult seems highly probable; but how does the more exact location of Triikka fit into the picture? It is impossible to exclude on any grounds one of the two parts of Thessaly, Triikka and Lacereia, or to link the cult more strongly to one than to the other; it is quite possible that further archaeological excavations in the Lacereia region would turn up a claim to the Asclepius-cult just as valid as Triikka's. Thus we must simply assume that if the myth-cult relationship discussed above is indeed a valid one, both areas must have been associated with the early Asclepius-cult. Strabo's claim inclines us to regard the Triikka site as of slightly more lasting importance.²¹ Furthermore, Triikka is also the subject of another rare piece of material which may offer further insight into the Thessalian cult: the poem of Isyllus which was discovered on a stele in Epidauros and dated to c. 300 B.C. The following lines are of considerable interest:

οὐδέ κε Θεσσαλίας ἐν Τρίκκῃ πειραθείης
εἰς ἄδυτον καταβὰς Ἀσκληπιοῦ, εἰ μὴ ἀφ' ἁγνοῦ
πρώτον Ἀπόλλωνος βωμοῦ θύσαις Μαλεάτα.²²

This excerpt carries several intriguing implications for the Triikka cult, but for the purposes of this paper, two things stand out. The first is connected with the question of the shrine's antiquity. The poem's opening lines seem to be describing the early

whether the myths of the Thessalian Asclepius came into being in Thessaly to explain his cult there, or elsewhere to explain the movement of his cult from Thessaly to the new location. Either way, the implications for the role of Thessaly are the same.

²¹ Strabo also, however, regards Triikka as the birthplace of the mortal Asclepius (14.1.39). This may well reflect an attempt by the Triikkan cult site to appropriate Asclepius' birth, just as other areas did—an interesting possibility, given that it is almost always impossible to discern Thessalian thinking in this matter.

²² Isyllus, lines 29–31 (*IG* IV² 128).

stages of the cult of Apollo Maleatas, in aetiological vein (lacunae leave some slight room for doubt); the section quoted above follows immediately on from that. Edelstein and Edelstein read the lines as meaning, ‘*Even in Thessaly* you would not go down . . .’ (emphatic οὐδέ, line 29). That is, even in such a remote place. It is highly probable that Thessaly does stand for ‘beyond the pale’ here; but I think there is a further element of significance. Coming just after the aetiological lines described, I think the Trikkaian cult may well be being used as something antique, perhaps primitive, so that the full sense is something like, ‘*Even back then* in Thessaly . . .’. In which case, this reinforces the impression that Trikka was perceived as a cultic antecedent.

More significant here, however, is the word καταβάς. It indicates that Isyllus thought—and we have no reason to disbelieve him—that the ἄδυτον of Asclepius’ sanctuary at Trikka, its innermost chamber, was a place one had to descend to, was in other words underground. The significance of this fact is revealed by a verbal echo with accounts of another shrine: that of Trophonius at Lebadeia in Boeotia. Those who consulted Trophonius went down to do so; Pausanias provides a very full account of the process, and Herodotus indicates that the same basic principle persisted in his time by using the word καταβαίνειν to describe consulting the deity.²³ What is the significance of this method of consultation?²⁴

To shed light on the phenomenon of the underground chamber, one must look at the myths that existed about how both figures came to achieve more than mortal status after their mortal lives. Pindar’s *Pythian* 3 gives the fullest account of Asclepius’ life and death, about which there does not seem to have been the same level of disagreement as surrounded his birth and parentage, although we must remember that the role of Cheiron as teacher is peculiar to the Thessalian version. At any rate, the mortal Asclepius is a healer of miraculous skill, and people come for miles around to be cured. Eventually, however, he succumbs to the lure of money and goes a step too far, raising a man from the dead; Zeus at once strikes both down with his thunderbolt, in punishment. Pindar’s account ends with this death; it is the culmination of his message about the impossibility of deceiving a god, and he comments:

χρῆ τὰ εὐκότα παρ δαιμόνων μα -
 στενέμεν θναταῖς φρασίν
 γνόντα τὸ παρ ποδός, οἷας εἰμὲν αἴσας. (lines 59–60)

So Asclepius dies because he steps beyond his mortal remit and attempts something which is the preserve of a more exalted state.²⁵

There is greater variety in the accounts of how Trophonius died. Through Plutarch we have Pindar’s version: Trophonius and his brother Agamedes are builders working on the construction of Apollo’s temple at Delphi,²⁶ and while doing so demand payment from the god himself, to which he agrees. But the reward they receive is to die in their sleep.²⁷ Plutarch’s paraphrasing gives no hints as to how to read this outcome, whether Pindar intended it as fitting punishment for those impudent enough to demand a return for doing work for a god, or whether a peaceful departure from life

²³ Paus. 9.39; Hdt. 1.46 and (for καταβαίνειν) 8.134.

²⁴ On the consultation of hero-oracles and the role of incubation, see D. Ogden, *Greek and Roman Necromancy* (Princeton, 2001), 80–92.

²⁵ On this matter, see Tert. *Ad Nat.* 2.14.

²⁶ See *Hymn Hom. Ap.* 295–7.

²⁷ [Plut.] *Cons. ad Apoll.* 14.

really did constitute a reward. If the former, then Trophonius, like Asclepius, was punished for getting above his station as a mortal.²⁸

Other accounts fill in what happened after Trophonius' death. In one, Trophonius builds an underground prophecy-chamber in which, first as a living man and then, after his death, as a *δαμόνιον*, he gives out oracles.²⁹ In another, he and Agamedes plan to defraud Hyrieus, for whom they are building a treasure-house, of his treasure, but Agamedes is caught in a trap set by Hyrieus; Trophonius cuts off his brother's head and flees, pursued, and at Lebadeia the earth opens and swallows him up. He remains underground as a mantic power.³⁰ Already we can begin, by comparison, to discern some basic trends, and also to fill in what Pindar leaves out of the Asclepius-myth by ending with his death. A mortal life as a skilled practitioner of some craft (healing, building) is followed by an unusual death. This results in a state which is hard to define: death has occurred, and the underground location of the character is reminiscent of burial, and yet the experience has given them a special status that allows, in the case of Trophonius, the ability to prophesy, and in the case of Asclepius, the ability to continue his healing persona with new authority. Death, then, is the process which facilitates the movement into a different state.³¹

Although it is valuable to note these similarities between Asclepius and Trophonius—similarities that hinge on the phenomenon of the underground *ᾅδυτον*—we should avoid simply running the two together into a type; their divergences are also important. Most of all, whereas in most of the versions Trophonius' death results from his going into the subterranean chamber, Asclepius is struck by Zeus' thunderbolt, the *αἶθων* ('fiery') *κεραυνός*.³² Death underground and death by fire are not the same thing.³³ Whereas Trophonius' death links him in very closely with another Boeotian figure, Amphiaraus,³⁴ we might compare that of Asclepius with the birth of Dionysus. In the version used by Euripides in his *Bacchae*, it is a fiery thunderbolt that frees Dionysus from the mortal vessel of Semele and allows him to take on divine status in the thigh of his father Zeus. It is reasonable to regard Asclepius as in some ways between the two:

²⁸ On the possible arrogance of Asclepius, see Aesch. *Ag.* 1022–4.

²⁹ Scholiasts Thomas-Triclinius and *Anonyma Recentiora* on Aristophanes' *Clouds*, 506–8.

³⁰ Paus. 9.37; Scholiast on Aristophanes' *Clouds*, 506a.

³¹ Hyg. *Fab.* 251, includes Asclepius in a list of mythical characters 'qui licentia parcarum ab inferis redierunt'—that is, who obtain a special dispensation from the usual rule that once down in the Underworld it is impossible to re-emerge. On the special status conferred by a return from the realm of the dead, see n. 47. Walton sees this matter differently, commenting that 'the fact that [Asclepius] dies at all shows that he has lost his divinity' (A. Walton, *The Cult of Asklepios* [New York, 1894], 26). This claim occurs in the context of a theory about the 'demotion' of Asclepius from god to hero; in other words, Walton is attempting to plot the historical stages of the cult over time. As it is impossible, however, to answer with any certainty the perennial question of order (which came first, hero or god?) I regard it as a great deal more valuable to concentrate on the ideas which were alive in the myths and in people's attitudes at the time. And it is clear from the treatment of Asclepius in literature that his death was thought to have led on to and given rise to his divinity.

³² *Pyth.* 3, line 58.

³³ Although they sometimes overlap; witness Pindar's account of the miraculous disappearance of Amphiaraus (*Ol.* 6; see also Eur. *Supp.* 925–7). In this, Zeus saves the hero from the rout of the Argives from Thebes by using his *thunderbolt* to make the ground open and swallow him. A comparable case is that of Erechtheus, who in one mythic version is described as being struck by the trident of Poseidon. (See E. Kearns, *The Heroes of Attica* [London, 1989], 113–15 and 210–11.)

³⁴ Amphiaraus, whose healing oracle was at Oropus, is worth noting as another who progresses from skilled practitioner (here a prophet even in life), through miraculous death to a state of special authority.

like Trophonius, his new state results from a death-experience, before which he lived a mortal life; but like Dionysus, the instrument of his transition is divine fire. His *ἄδυστον*, however, and the process whereby visitors descended to consult him, emphasize his character as a subterranean power quite different from Dionysus.

Thus far, this idea of the subterranean Asclepius has rested entirely on the passage of Isyllus quoted above—a source from outside Thessaly, and a lone voice besides. Is there any material from Thessaly itself that could have a bearing on the subterranean nature of Asclepius? As has been said, the Trikka shrine itself has not been found. However, it is quite clear when one examines the identifiable cultic remains we do have that Asclepius was worshipped in a number of places in Thessaly. By the time epigraphic evidence becomes available on the matter, his cult was clearly accompanied by the trappings that indicate a role within the structure of the city and its ordinances.³⁵ The most common representations of the god from the fifth and fourth centuries, however, are on coins, which do provide valuable insights into the iconography of deities. Indeed, it is coinage that reveals a crucial feature of Asclepius in Thessaly: his connection with the snake. Asclepius with an attendant snake features on coins from Trikka,³⁶ Larissa,³⁷ Magnesia,³⁸ and Arne.³⁹ Of course, this association will come as no surprise given the prominence of the snake's appearance in other cult-centres; it has already appeared significantly in the discussion above of the god's physical movements. Its presence in Thessaly, however, is important because of the constant need to guard against assuming that the trappings of the cult were the same in all areas. It is especially easy to transfer material from areas where it is abundant into a region such as Thessaly where it is in such short supply. That this should not be done unquestioningly is demonstrated by the fact that the dogs which are so much in evidence in other sites as companions and attributes of the god (the animals were kept, for instance, in the shrines at Epidauros⁴⁰ and Athens) are not at all prominent in Thessaly, and seem to have been unimportant compared with the snake.⁴¹

The symbolic associations of the snake in Greek cult and cultic iconography are far too complex to tackle satisfactorily in one part of one paper.⁴² Nonetheless, one observation may be singled out as especially important: the connection of snakes with underground spaces and with the powers that controlled them. Snakes were thought to be able to move in and out of such spaces; Herodotus describes them as being 'children of the earth' (1.78), as if they emerged from it, and this supposed natural attribute spilled over into their character in cult and ritual. Their importance in the imagery of

³⁵ Official priests of Asclepius existed in Gonnoi in the third century B.C. (see *IG IX*² 1040) and in Phalanna in the second (*IG IX*² 1231).

³⁶ See P. Gardner, *British Museum Catalogue of Coins: Thessaly to Aitolia* (London, 1883), 52, no. 16 (pl. XI.13): Asclepius with a serpent and a bird (300–190 B.C.).

³⁷ *Ibid.* 28, no. 44 (pl. V.9): 480–450 B.C. Also B. Head, *Historia Numorum: A Manual of Greek Numismatics* (Oxford, 1911), 299: an example from between 400 and 344 B.C.

³⁸ Head (n. 37), 300: Asclepius seated with serpent-twined staff, and possibly a dog at his feet (197–146 B.C.).

³⁹ Head (n. 37), 293: Asclepius (or Apollo) with serpent twined around a tree (400–344 B.C.).

⁴⁰ See Paus. 2.27.2 for the dog in the chryselephantine statue of Asclepius at Epidauros.

⁴¹ E. Bevan (*Representations of Animals in Sanctuaries of Artemis and Other Olympian Deities*, BAR International Series 315 [1986]) provides an interesting survey of dogs in some Greek cults including that of Asclepius; see esp. 115–130. One Thessalian coin (see Head [n. 37], 300) might depict Asclepius with a dog; but this single uncertain example does not go far towards establishing an iconographic trend.

⁴² For the association of the serpent with Asclepius, see J. Schouten, *The Rod and Serpent of Asclepius: Symbol of Medicine* (Rotterdam, 1967), 35–40 *et passim*. Also Walton (n. 31), 11–16.

burial and tombs is surely connected to their ability to pass between the upper and lower worlds, possibly with a mediating function. One might compare the myth of the child Sosipolis, who saved the Eleans from their enemies and then was transformed into a snake and disappeared into the earth. (Sosipolis was worshipped at Olympia in conjunction with Eileithyia.)⁴³ Given the chthonic associations of the snake, we should not be surprised to find it appearing at the shrine at Lebadeia. According to Pausanias (9.39.11), the visitor to the god enters the hole in the ground holding barley cakes with honey. A snake-connection is not explicitly made at this point, and yet one is reminded of the ancient motif of placating a guardian serpent with honey-cakes; a good example is the joke of Aristophanes' which compares entering the *phrontisterion* of Socrates with going down into the hole of Trophonius. Both experiences are frightening ones, and the honey-cakes are taken as a means of protection, to fend off a potentially menacing presence.⁴⁴ The link is conclusive when we note that at the sanctuary of Asclepius at Titane, visitors had to feed the sacred snakes before entering (Paus. 2.11.18). So already snakes have provided a connection between Trophonius and Asclepius; and it is when mentioning snakes that Pausanias comments on the similarity of Asclepius and Trophonius: near the oracle, he tells us, on the bank of the river Hercyna, was a cave containing statues of figures with serpents coiled around their staffs, and he remarks:

ταῦτα εἰκάσαι μὲν ἄν τις Ἀσκληπιοῦ τε εἶναι καὶ 'Υγιείας, εἶεν δ' ἄν Τροφώνιος καὶ 'Ἐρκυνα, ἐπεὶ μηδὲ τοὺς δράκοντας Ἀσκληπιοῦ μᾶλλον ἢ καὶ Τροφωνίου νομίζουσιν ἱεροὺς εἶναι.⁴⁵ (9.39.3–4)

What emerges from this is that the similar identities of Trophonius and Asclepius hinge on the earth-connections which are indicated both by their associations with snakes and with the importance of an underground chamber in their cults and in the methods of consulting them. It is worth noting that at Cyphanta too (in the south-east corner of the Peloponnese) the cult of Asclepius was based on a cave, a chamber within the earth.⁴⁶

The examples from Boeotia have allowed us to formulate a type of hero with which Asclepius largely conforms. Usefully, however, another instance is to be found in Thessaly itself. Caeneus is a much less prominent mythical figure than Asclepius; he was one of the Lapiths, the mythical Thessalian tribe made famous by their brawling with the Centaurs at the wedding-feast of Peirithous. Various stories were told about Caeneus, including the following, which finds its earliest expression in a fragment of Pindar:

ὁ δὲ χλωραῖς ἐλάταισι τυπεῖς
ᾤχεθ' ὑπὸ χθόνα Καινεὺς σχίσαις ὀρθῶ ποδὶ γὰν. (fr. 150 Bowra)

This excerpt is preceded by three lines about the drunken, violent Centaurs, and then a lacuna. Later treatments provide the link. Hyginus (*Fab.* 14) tells us that Caeneus, the son of Elatus of Magnesia, was made invulnerable by Poseidon; desiring to be

⁴³ See Paus. 6.20.2–5. For another hero 'supporting its side' in war, see 1.36.1: Cychreus at the battle of Salamis.

⁴⁴ See Aristophanes, *Clouds* 506–8, and scholia.

⁴⁵ Shortly afterwards he describes another statue of Trophonius, situated in the grove and made by Praxiteles, as 'resembling Asklepios'.

⁴⁶ See Paus. 3.24.5. The author tells us of another hero whom myth associated with the snake: Aristomenes, who—according to the Messenians—was born from the union of a mortal woman and a god or *daimon* in snake form (4.14.7–8).

rid of him, the Centaurs struck him with tree-trunks. Apollonius Rhodius (*Argon.* 1.63–4) envisaged him thus being driven into the ground under the blows, like a human nail. To me this picturesque detail looks like an elaboration of a more mysterious happening whereby Caeneus split the ground with (a stamp of?) his foot and vanished into the resulting cleft to escape his assailants. This particular motif of the miraculous disappearance into the ground for the purpose of escape is immediately reminiscent of some of the myths told about Trophonius and Agamedes described above. It is a motif in which death specifically does not occur; indeed, disappearance prevents death. It is a different mythical response, however, to the general phenomenon of the underground hero—another idea as to the extraordinary event which might have put him in the earth. And it is extremely valuable to have a Thessalian example of this phenomenon to augment the Boeotian examples with which we began.

So we have identified a group of figures to which Asclepius belongs, figures united by similarities in the *αἰτίαι* that developed around them. Let us restate the shared features of this group. They live, as mortals, in a particular place; they undergo an experience characterized either as death or miraculous disappearance; the final result is a cult centred on an underground space, in a particular location. Thus, by careful comparison with other regions, we start to see tied together the various strands of the Thessalian Asclepius: mythic hero and subterranean power are linked at the moment of death/disappearance. Often this process is expressed graphically: what turns mortal craftsman into specialist deity is the moment of disappearance into the earth, and this happening marks the beginning of a cult. And it is clear that Asclepius underwent a very similar process, though one must bear in mind some important differences; most notably, that whereas Asclepius dies in order to become a god, Caeneus and—in some accounts—Trophonius and Amphiaraus undergo a sort of simulation of death and burial without explicitly losing their lives. But both actual and virtual death serve the same function: placing the hero in the earth and moving him into a different state of being.⁴⁷

How can we connect these observations with the importance of location in the treatment of Asclepius? The crux of the matter is that Asclepius in his early Thessalian form was a hero whose death-experience and residence in the earth were intimately intertwined. At Trikke the connection between god, cult, and location are graphically embodied in the phenomenon of the *ἄδυτον*, as is the source of his power. Key to Asclepius' nature is personal residency, and the moment of his moving out of the human world is also the moment which fixes him in place.⁴⁸ This immediate relationship is quickly lost as we move away to other, later cult centres and to a form of the god more in accordance with wider patterns of divinity; in other words, as Asclepius is cut adrift from the original context of his cult, and loses many outward signs of his

⁴⁷ See E. Rohde, *Psyche: The Cult of Souls and Belief in Immortality among the Greeks* (London, 1925; trans. W. B. Hillis from the 8th German edition), 90–1; he sees the miraculous disappearance as a symbolic version of the death-experience, and points out that the ability to go beneath the surface of the earth without fully dying confers a special power and status. One might compare Heracles' trips to the Underworld, and the amazement with which lesser mortals greet his return alive; e.g. Eur. *Heracl.* 610, with the incredulous *ῥοιτῶς*.

⁴⁸ Kearns has commented on the equivalent phenomenon concerning heroines: a crucial event (more often a sexual trauma such as rape than a death-experience) results in them 'haunting' a spring for ever, just as a male hero can be fixed in an underground space by a transitional event: E. Kearns, 'Between god and man: status and function of heroes and their sanctuaries,' in A. Schachter (ed.), *Le sanctuaire grec*, Fondation Hardt 37 (Geneva, 1990), 65–107.

underground-hero persona.⁴⁹ Given this process of movement and change, one might expect that of all his original characteristics the one most sure to be lost would have been this equation between Asclepius' power and his location. But, as has been shown, the importance of placing the god remained to the fore of later manifestations of his worship, and a sense of his physical residency was essential in establishing and maintaining the status and authenticity of a sanctuary. His presence continued to be something which could be located, appropriated, and tied down. This does not mean that places vied with each other to 'possess' the one and only Asclepius, though there was, as we have seen, competition for *relative* importance. He had clearly so far developed away from his local form as to sustain a number of geographically divergent versions of himself. In this respect, of course, he is quite different from the Boeotian examples and that of Caeneus that I have used in this study; they were still firmly rooted in the characteristics of the hero-type which Asclepius had largely left behind. And yet, as I have said, the ancient preoccupation with establishing both where the mortal Asclepius came from and his later movements as a god distinguishes him quite strikingly from the treatment of his divine fellows. It is also surely fair to say that the continued hero-qualities of Asclepius were an important part of his healing function.⁵⁰

Since something has been said about the hero-qualities of Asclepius, however, it is necessary also to acknowledge his significant divergence from the pattern of the hero in one respect at least. The key observation is that there seems to have been much more reticence in antiquity about Asclepius' death than was usual in hero-cults. Places were much more enthusiastic about claiming to have hosted his birth than his death.⁵¹ It seems likely that although it is not inconceivable for a god to have semi-human parentage (for example Dionysus), for them to die sits uncomfortably with their divinity. Related to this is the observation that Asclepius did most of his travelling in snake form. We never hear of his bones being transported to a new cult site, a method often favoured with heroes.⁵² In other words, by the time of Pausanias at least, many things had been done to smooth away the elements in his nature in which god and hero were perceived as being in conflict, of which the chief was death.⁵³ Yet the similarities with the heroes were, I think, more influential than these differences; and indeed it could be maintained that one feature of the underground hero was largely responsible for Asclepius' great success as a healer-god. The earth-residency of the god allowed direct consultation.⁵⁴ When someone visited the Lebadeia shrine, he did not merely

⁴⁹ As J. Larson puts it, 'As his cult spread, it lost one of the elements most characteristic of the hero, the localization of the cult around a grave' (*Greek Heroine Cults* [Madison, 1995], 62).

⁵⁰ Heroes of the type discussed here are distinguished by their tendency to specialize in a particular function, almost always healing or prophecy. It is as if spatial and functional limitation go hand in hand: a fixed residence and a fixed role exist naturally together. See W. Burkert, *Greek Religion* (Oxford, 1985; trans. J. Raffan), 214; he notes the fact of Asclepius' specialization as something distinct from 'the other gods with their complex personalities' but does not attempt to draw conclusions from the observation.

⁵¹ Although there were exceptions to this rule in the form of the few 'tombs' of Asclepius which were later established, including at Epidaurus (see *Clementina Homilia*, 621). By no means all hero-cults involved tombs: see Kearns (n. 48), 65–6.

⁵² The most famous example being the recovery of the bones of Theseus by Athens; compare the Spartans retrieving the bones of their hero Orestes. On this matter and the Athenian cult of Theseus in general, see Garland (n. 8), 82–98.

⁵³ See A. D. Nock, *Essays on Religion and the Ancient World*, ed. Z. Stewart (Cambridge, MA, 1972), 575–602, on the role of death in separating gods and heroes, and the exceptions to the rule.

⁵⁴ It is interesting to note the distinction drawn by Rohde (n. 47), 91 between martial heroes—such as Achilles—who were regarded as living on the Islands of the Blessed and as having little effect on the affairs of men, and those dwelling in underground spaces which men could visit, whose assistance and intervention in mortal affairs was an important *raison d'être*.

descend into a place which was sacred to Trophonius; rather, he *went down to Trophonius* himself, and this was surely so also in the case of Trikkaian Asclepius and his ἄδουτον. The immediacy of his presence was suited to the very specific and personal nature of the queries laid at his door.

The cult of Asclepius is unusual precisely because it seems to hold out the possibility of tracing important aspects backwards in time in a way which is clearly out of the question with the majority of other gods. In most cases, the process by which a single local figure becomes a host of variants under one name, all over Greece, is entirely lost in prehistory. Asclepius, by comparison, did not achieve widespread popularity until the classical period and therefore the transmittal of his cult from place to place is preserved in the sources. But we are assisted also by the very phenomenon with which this paper began: the fact that people in antiquity were *interested* in that transmittal and in the relationship between god and place.

However, the aim of this paper has not been simply to take advantage of this interest in order to form a theory about the origins of the cult. That is something which has been attempted, to a limited extent, several times in the past by such as Kerenyi, Walton, and Edelstein and Edelstein. A far more important task is to explore ways in which an origin, or in this case a precursor, has continued to exert influence on the cult even when the main focus of that cult has moved away in time and space. Kearns is surely right to say that, by itself, the origin of a cult—even if it is possible to discern it—should not be expected to yield revelatory understanding. The danger lurking in the origins-search is that the searcher will come to imagine that by identifying the earliest form of a god he or she has discovered its true nature. This rests on the unconscious belief that a god, once created, has an existence of its own independent of human context; an existence that is subject to more and more corrosion over the passage of time. The foolish Greeks have forgotten their deity's real character, and it is up to the clever scholar to uncover it! In fact, of course, the nature of the god is exactly what his worshippers confer on him at any given time. Therefore, to say that Asclepius was 'an earth spirit'⁵⁵ is meaningless unless one examines what part that persona may have played in the dynamic existence of the cult over time. I hope that by charting the legacy of the Thessalian cult, something has been done to deepen our understanding of a deity who is perhaps too often regarded simply as the divine healer, a paradigm of the good physician.

I end, however, by asking what the implications of this paper might be for our understanding of Thessaly. It is necessary to wait for the discovery of new archaeological material before any firm theories can be formed about Thessaly as the actual starting point of the cult. Yet it is interesting to dwell on the possibility that a cult which reached such prominence and sway might have come out of a region so shrouded in obscurity. After all, the inward-looking tendency which dogged Thessaly in the classical period was not always the rule, and the prominence of Thessaly in the lives of the heroes of epic (consider Jason, Achilles, Chiron, and Admetus) hints that the area may once have enjoyed influence far beyond its own boundaries. The role of Thessaly as a source and precursor with lasting influence may well be one which deserves further consideration.

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⁵⁵ As does Walton (n. 31), 11.